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Year: 2014

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## **Hua Guofeng**

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Posted at the Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich  
ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-94123>  
Book Section

Originally published at:

Grano, Simona Alba (2014). Hua Guofeng . In: Brown, Kerry. Berkshire dictionary of Chinese biography. Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire Publishing., 1416-1429.

# Huá Guófēng

华国锋

1921–2008—“Chairman” of the People’s Republic of China (1976–1981)



## Summary

Hua Guofeng, the handpicked successor of Mao Zedong, was relatively unknown when he assumed the title of “Chairman” in 1976; less than two years later he was eclipsed by Deng Xiaoping’s rise. Information on his personal life and childhood years is scant. His tendency to stay behind the scenes is possibly what convinced Mao to appoint him as his successor and unifier of the country. His cautious character was likely also one of the reasons why he didn’t succeed in staying in power for long; he had no real allies to sustain him in time of crisis. Hua Guofeng was an important name, but it was also one that passed from celebration into silence in a very short time span, doomed to play only a transitional role.

**H**ua Guofeng was an exceptional personage in many aspects. During the period he was in office, Communist

Party media portrayed him as a benevolent and reserved leader tinged with an aura of sanctity. Political biographies written on him both in the 1980s (Ding 1980) and more recently (Weatherley 2010) have shown different sides of him. According to Robert Weatherley and Zhāng Píng huà 张平化, the Hunan First Secretary in 1959 who worked under Hua after 1977 in the Central Propaganda Department, Hua was a self-effacing leader who did not spurn getting directly involved in the projects he was overseeing (Weatherley 2010, 73; Zhang 1977, 17–18). To others, however, he was a career-oriented politician who managed to become China’s topmost leader, starting from a low provincial-level cadre position in the 1960s. What is remarkable is that in less than ten years he was able to rise from the post of provincial Chinese Communist Party (CCP) secretary to that of Chairman of the Communist Party and de facto leader of the country in 1977.

Beginning in 1976, Hua held briefly the three most important positions of China's administrative and political echelons: leader of the party, head of state, and chief of the Central Military Commission.

## Early Life

Hua Guofeng's childhood years are shrouded in mystery. His family's background, as well as the identity of his father, is still unknown to this day. This has prompted speculation that his past is being obscured deliberately (Ding 1980, I). Two rumors in particular have circulated in the past twenty years regarding his childhood. The first one, based on a leaflet named "Bombarding Hua Guofeng" allegedly produced by a pro-Deng Xiaoping faction named "The Spartacus Troops of the number 637 Headquarters," was translated into English and published in Hong Kong as well as in mainland China in 1977. Although it is only an assumption, given that the leaflet came from Guangzhou (Canton), where \*Dèng Xiǎopíng's 邓小平 (1904–1997) military friends were based, it is very plausible that these were in fact the people responsible for writing and distributing the leaflet in an attempt to damage Hua's credentials as chairman, favoring Deng.

According to this publication, Hua Guofeng's mother, Hua Yu, daughter of a rich landowner, was sold as a concubine

to a rich peasant by the name of Liu, nicknamed "white monkey" (*bái hóuzi* 白猴子) because of his pale complexion. While at his side, Hua Yu had an illicit liaison with a tenant farmer employed by Liu. In 1920 she gave birth to a child, Liu Zhengrong, who grew up as Liu's son for a few years. When it was clear that he didn't look like Liu at all, due to his dark-skinned complexion, Liu became suspicious; a suspicion that quickly became reality when he caught Hua Yu and her lover, Qin, together. While Qin was incarcerated, Hua Yu was able to flee with her son. They moved around for a few years, eventually ending up in Taiyuan, Jiaocheng County. There, Hua Yu married a Communist underground worker named Hua (given name unknown), and from that moment on her son's name was changed to Hua Guofeng, which may have been a reference to resisting Japanese occupation. It was common for Communist leaders at that time to take on revolutionary names. This would indicate that his change of names had nothing to do with his newly acquired father, and that it happened, in fact, much later.

According to the same "Bombarding Hua Guofeng" leaflet, in 1938 Hua Yu went to Yan'an and there became intimate with Kāng Shēng 康生, who was in charge of secret service and intelligence at the time and who later had Hua Yu's husband murdered (Ding 1980, 5; CNA 1977). It is clear from these events, which depict Hua's mother as a philanderer

\*People marked with an asterisk have entries in this dictionary.

and a promiscuous woman, that this source cannot be considered unbiased or purely motivated by the urge to inform in its description of Hua Guofeng's early years. The information about his mother being the daughter of a landowner could partly explain, if true, why the Chinese Communist authorities were—and still are—keen to keep his past well hidden. The exact opposite is true for \*Máo Zédōng 毛泽东 (1893–1976) and other official leaders, such as \*Zhōu Ēnlái 周恩来 (1898–1976; first Premier of the People's Republic of China), whose childhood years have been described and recounted in detail by the media.

The second rumor is even more damaging and states that Hua was none other than Mao Zedong's illegitimate child born out of wedlock. An unverified Internet rumor claims that in 1966, during a conversation with Kang Sheng and Zhou Enlai Hua discovered his true identity and that Mao Zedong was his biological father (quoted in Weatherley 2010, 22).

According to this version, Hua was actually born in Hunan Province, as Mao's eldest son, in 1920. (Until recently the exact date of his birth was undecided, with some sources stating that it was 1920 and others stating 1921; the final determination was ironically found in the many obituaries published after his death in 2008, from which we can infer that he was born on 16 February 1921). At that time Mao was leading the local farmers' movement and was

already married to Yang Kaihui (his first wife). When she found out that he was having an affair with a woman by the surname of Yao she supposedly reacted by demanding that Yao (who died shortly after) and the young Hua Guofeng be sent to Jiaocheng County, near Taiyuan (*The Epoch Times* 2008). According to the same Hong Kong magazine, after Zhou Enlai revealed the truth to Hua Guofeng about his origins in 1966, Hua agreed to keep quiet for Mao's image but decided, in 2001, to withdraw from the Chinese Communist Party, citing as an explanation that the Party had betrayed the legitimate interests of workers and farmers. According to the authors of the article, the true reason behind this choice was that by doing this he could finally claim his rightful name as the eldest son of Mao Zedong (*Asahi News* 2001 as quoted *The Epoch Times* 2008). This version seems to be quite unrealistic, however, and an unknown source has recently claimed that the Beijing Hospital is actually in possession of DNA material proving that the two (Mao and Hua) were not related (BBC 2008; NAOL.CA 2008).

During an interview with the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) in 1977, Hua himself stated quite vaguely that after his father's death, at the age of six, he grew up with his mother and elder brother in very poor conditions (Weatherley 2010, 22). It is quite unusual for a CCP leader to be characterized by such a lack of personal information. Numerous

biographies have been written on famous and infamous leaders of the CCP, and every detail of their early lives has been scrutinized. This has prompted some scholars (e.g., Ding and Weatherley) to ask themselves whether there was something in Hua's past that would be highly damaging to his political career, which made it best kept unspoken. This would explain why even in 2010, two years after his death, no additional posthumous detail on his childhood years had yet come out (Weatherley 2010, 25).

## Early Career

Hua Guofeng was not widely known early in his career. While he was gifted in military organization, this time in his life did not produce a wealth of networking in order to work toward climbing the political ladder. His low position in terms of national status during this time makes his later political rise in China that much more unusual.

## Hua in Shanxi (1921–1949)

During the 1940s, Hua was a young guerilla fighter in the operations against the Japanese in Jiaodong County, Shanxi. Shanxi is a province of symbolic importance for the generation of Chinese Communist Party leaders who were in power after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. Deng Xiaoping and \*Péng Déhuái 彭德怀 (1898–1974, military leader of the Chinese Communist Party),

for example, both established their political reputation there. In this regard, Hua's experience in Shanxi is atypical in the sense that no event of major political or professional meaning occurred to him while there, nor was he able to build a meaningful network of contacts for his later career (Weatherley 2010, 21). His career was, at best, ordinary, which makes his subsequent rise to China's administrative and political top positions even more impressive.

It seems that his skills at organizing armed resistance led him to quickly climb the professional ladder. After holding a series of senior posts he soon became one of the major CCP cadres of the Jiaodong County Committee while coordinating anti-Japanese activities at all levels (Ding 1980, 17). In 1940 he became chairman of the Joint Anti-Japanese Association (Kàngrì Jiùguó Liánhéhuì 抗日救国联合会). Hua's main task consisted in organizing people belonging to the association into separate guerilla units (*mínbīng zǔzhī* 民兵组织), who then provided assistance to the Eighth Route Army (*bālù jūn* 八路军), which was the larger of the two major Chinese Communist forces that formed a unit of the National Revolutionary Army of the Republic of China, which fought the Japanese from 1937 to 1945. These units tried to resist the Japanese campaigns of destruction in Shanxi. In 1942 Hua was appointed director of the Jiaodong Propaganda Department. Among many other tasks, he had to provide sponsorship and



ideas to Communist theatrical troupes from the area. In the course of the three years (1942–1945) he served in this capacity, he came to be involved and influential in the activities of the Village Drama Movement (Nóngcūn xìjù yùndòng 农村戏剧运动).

There has been debate regarding his role during the Civil War period, and during the land reform era that came later. According to author Ding Wang, Hua distinguished himself for his ability and ruthlessness in suppressing landlords and middle peasants, becoming “notorious for being brutal and relentless” while confiscating properties (Ding1980, 25). Weatherley aptly points out, however, that while it may very well have been so, in the absence of irrefutable proofs we simply cannot be sure (Weatherley 2010, 41).

During the ten years he spent in Shanxi, Hua became an expert of guerrilla and intelligence networks but again, the peculiarity of this period is its insignificance in terms of contacts and professional experiences that Hua was able to build while in Jiaodong. In other words, at least during his Shanxi period, he was a gifted and capable local cadre, well known at the local level but still utterly unknown at the national level. (See the sidebar on page 1437 of this volume for details on the Communist Party’s cadre system.)

## Hua in Hunan (1949–1971)

It was when Hua left Shanxi toward Hunan that his political career began to

rise. Hua became known to Mao Zedong during this time and began gaining his trust consistently showing unfailing support of Mao’s ideas. This ultimately led to Mao’s endorsement of Hua to become his successor.

Hua left Shanxi in 1949 and went first to Hebei for a one-month training. After that, as part of a Southbound Work Group (Nánxià gōngzuòtuán 南下工作团), he moved to Hunan where he would remain for twenty-two years, the most important years of his political career before becoming party chairman in 1976. He first settled in Xiangyin, where he soon became party secretary and a political commissar of the County Armed Forces Department. In June 1951, he was transferred from Xiangyin to Xiangtan County where he took up a list of official assignments from secretary of the county’s CCP Committee, to political commissar of the county’s People’s Armed Force Department. Even though the transfer in itself was not a promotion, by working in Mao Zedong’s home province he was able to attract Mao’s attention, an event that most probably had a direct correlation in Hua being, years later, hand-picked by Mao himself to be his successor. In Xiangtan, Hua became deputy party secretary of the Xiangtan Prefecture and was then promoted full party secretary in 1953. This promotion marked the moment in his career when he rose from a middle-cadre position (*zhōngjí gàn bù* 中级干部) to a high-level cadre position (*gāojí gàn bù* 高级干部).



During the rural collectivization period, in which land cooperatives were formed, Hua busied himself particularly with those mutual assistance groups (or mutual aid teams) that were established in Shaoshan, Mao's birthplace; there is speculation that, willingly or by chance, this earned him Mao's attention and trust (Ding 1980, 41; Weatherley 2010, 5). So during the seven years he spent in Xiangtang Prefecture, he became a competent party secretary with good organizational skills, in-depth knowledge of propaganda techniques, and a high level of education.

Hua was always quite committed to Mao's revolutionary ideas and, especially regarding the collectivization period, embraced enthusiastically every policy coming from Mao that called for an acceleration of the process. This was an attitude that made him quite unpopular among his immediate local superiors, who had lukewarm reactions toward the rapid pace of rural collectivization.

In May of 1956 he was transferred from Xiangtan to the Hunan provincial People's Council in Changsha where he took up the position of chief of the Culture and Education Office (ZGHW 1977, 21) and, at the same time, became secretary of the local CCP section. This was the first step in his career as a party and government cadre at the provincial level. Those were the years when he consolidated his previously acquired skills (Shanxi warfare units) in organizing and coordinating activities at various levels, which would then, in the

years when he was in power, increase the popularized image portrayed by the media of a gifted and pragmatic problem-solver.

### **The Post-Leap Recovery Period (1958–1965)**

In 1958, after filling in a number of posts dealing with culture and education, Hua shifted his interests to the economy and construction sectors. In July of the same year he became vice-governor of Hunan Province, and in September he was also named alternate secretary of the Hunan Provincial CCP Committee, becoming one of the leading members of the committee's economic department. For the first time, since his arrival in Hunan, he started chairing and heading a number of bodies responsible for economical planning.

In the early 1960s, his political career suffered a setback and he was "sent down" by being assigned to a lower level of party hierarchy. To be more precise, he was sent back to Xiangtan where, due to his extensive knowledge of the area, he was supposed to remedy the innumerable problems provoked by Mao's Great Leap Forward (Dàyuè jìn 大跃进) and assist in the local recovery program. (The Great Leap Forward was a campaign aimed at advancing China's agricultural and industrial development to the level of the West through the promotion of people's communes, and by encouraging the rural workforce to smelt iron in backyard furnaces, among other ill-advised

schemes.) This was a difficult moment for Hua, in part because of the professional setback but also because, being a fervent supporter of Mao's agricultural communes, he was opposed to some of the measures introduced in order to salvage the economy, such as "fixing production quotas on the household basis." Weatherley notes, however, that Hua was not as slavish toward Mao or to the official party line (Weatherley 2010, 70) as he is often portrayed to be both in the official literature (for obvious reasons) and in the scholarly literature (Ding 1980, 50; Oksenberg and Yeung 1977, 13, 15). We find evidence of this in his taking a critical position against the "unrealistic output targets" set by certain officials during the Great Leap Forward's initial phase and in his taking Mao's side on rural collectivization even when, initially, it seemed that a more cautious approach would prevail.

According to Ding, in the summer of 1964 Hua was transferred back to Changsha, albeit with an extension of his duties and competences to areas like culture, education, agriculture, propaganda, finance, and trade (Ding 1980, 65; Oksenberg and Yeung 1977, 46). After 1965 he became mainly responsible for farm work and for the Shaoshan irrigation plant, a project that contributed to making him well known around the country and increased his political prestige in spreading the idea of Hua as a capable and skilled organizer of manpower. While there, he also oversaw the

renovation of Mao Zedong's old school and the construction of a display hall. This has prompted speculation, among some scholars, that he had ulterior motives (namely ingratiating himself to Mao) for taking up these projects (Weatherley 2010, 7; Ding 1980, 72). Between 1965 and 1966 he was also assigned to the foreign policy realm and, specifically, to oversee war preparation in case of an escalation in the Vietnam War and a possible Chinese involvement in the war.

## The Beijing Period (1971–1981)

By the early 1970s, Hua had become first secretary of the Hunan Provincial Party Committee and political commissar of the Canton Military Region. At this point, he moved to Beijing, probably in September of 1971. At the national level, Hua Guofeng had already become a fairly important member of the State Council by 1971, ranking as high as vice-premier. These promotions had happened largely due to the institutional void left by the "Red Guard purges" in the political echelons of Hunan Province. Thanks to his technical expertise, he was able to put his capabilities to good use at the State Council. One of his main tasks was assisting Zhou Enlai in his daily duties. In 1973 he was promoted to the Politburo while continuing to work in the State Council as vice-premier, and two years later, in 1975, he became minister of public security. Officially,



though, recognition that he was acting as vice-premier came only in 1975 at the first meeting of the Fifth National People's Congress (NPC) to reorganize the State Council. At the time it was in fact a common practice to be assigned to a certain post without a previous official announcement.

Around the year 1975 the struggle for the leadership in the highest echelons of the CCP became fiercer than ever. The two politicians who had dominated the Cultural Revolution decade (1966–1976), Chén Bódá 陈伯达 (1904–1989) and \*Lín Biāo 林彪 (1907–1971) (Mao's chosen successor), were removed by Mao after the latter plotted against him and the party. (Officially called the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," this was a complex socio-political mass movement that urged people—especially young people—to rebel against traditional, capitalist, and so-called backwards cultural elements in Chinese society; this radicalization, spurred on by Mao Zedong, caused massive social, political, and cultural disruptions, killing and injuring many Chinese people.) In 1975, following the Fifth National People's Congress, Deng Xiaoping became responsible for the reorganization of the party apparatus; Hua was vice-premier in charge of science and technology (an assignment that brought him very close to Deng, at the time unofficially in charge of the country), while future National Party leader Hú Yàobāng 胡耀邦 (1915–1989) took over the role that previously belonged

to Hua by taking up the leadership of the Academy of Sciences.

A particularly eventful year in the history of the People's Republic of China was 1976. Not only is this the year in which three of the country's most influential leaders (Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and \*Zhū Dé 朱德) passed away, but a series of events like the Tangshan earthquake in July and the Tiananmen incident in April—the latter triggered by the death of Zhou Enlai four months before, and not to be confused with the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989—generated social disturbance among the people that further aggravated the economic crisis of China. At the same time a delicate political battle was raging between the two most influential factions of China's political echelons: that of Mao's last wife, \*Jiāng Qīng 江青 (1914–1991) and the Gang of Four with their radical ideas, and that of the "bureaucrats," among whom were the late Zhou Enlai, Lǐ Xiānniàn 李先念, Deng Xiaoping, and many others. Among the numerous struggles between different political factions, Hua was fortunate enough to be able to steer himself from one side (the more radical one being that of the Gang of Four) to the other without getting burned. If Mao had originally planned to have his wife and three of her associates, Wáng Hóngwén 王洪文, Yáo Wényuán 姚文元, and Zhāng Chūnqiáo 张春桥, succeed him, his aims didn't take into account the strong reactions from the bureaucrats and from the military leaders.

Hua Guofeng was thus most probably picked as a compromise leader and appointed as acting premier. Ding Wang seems to suggest that Hua Guofeng was never actually meant to be Mao Zedong's successor. He claims that when Mao had previously nominated Lin Biao as his rightful heir, everyone was aware of it and no one dared to attack Lin Biao. But with Hua everything was different; not only was he constantly attacked by the Gang of Four, but he was also never publicly named by Mao, even though he claimed he was (Ding 1980, 126). He seems to have been a choice of compromise on the part of Mao who, being unable to elect one of his more radical acolytes due to the resistance of the party veterans, opted for Hua instead. Having served as first provincial party secretary and having been in charge of various important sectors while living in Hunan, he had significant credentials that were not easy to discredit. He had moderate political views, which were for the most part unknown to the majority of the people, and was thus an acceptable choice both for the party elders and for Mao as someone who was easy to control and gets things done. This could also explain why, at first, he was only nominated as acting premier and not full premier, being, in fact, a compromise figure.

On 3 February 1976, Hua was named acting premier by the CCP Central Committee. After Zhou Enlai's death, Mao launched a campaign to purge Deng, in which Hua also took part. Once Deng

was removed, Hua became first vice chairman of the party and then premier of the State Council in April of that same year. The decision to remove Deng and promote Hua came from Mao (through the words of his nephew and, at the time, sole confidant, Máo Yuǎnxīn 毛远新), but the decision was then made official by the Politburo, although through an unconstitutional process.

Hua was actually appointed as acting premier, the first time such a position was being used in China, suggesting that the time was not ripe yet to make him full premier, which could be done only after a meeting of the National People's Congress. As observed both by Weatherly (127) and MacFarquhar (1997, 298fn) when Hua finally became full premier, in October of 1976, he became so in absence of any constitutional process (suggesting no meeting by the NPC had actually taken place). Hua consistently tried to keep himself in a political middle position, cautious not to counter Mao's will, but also careful not to clash with the "bureaucrats" faction by refraining to attack them unnecessarily. According to Ding Wang, at the time Hua was ascribed to the Third Force Group 第三势力, a group defined by the Chinese media as "the wind faction" because its members opportunistically switched sides when convenient (Ding 1980, 108).

Another hypothesis is that Hua was actually a kind of symbolic figure elected by General Yè Jiànyīng 叶剑英 (1897–1986), who acted as Hua's kingmaker,

promoting him in order to discredit and dismantle the radical elements of the Gang of Four. At any rate, even when Hua Guofeng became full premier, he did so without a formal appointment and in the absence of a formal procedure, a fact that Deng Xiaoping later sought to exploit in order to disqualify him.

### Hua as Chairman (1976–1981)

After Mao's death in September of 1976, the political scene was still dominated by two opposing factions trying to seize power. Mao's testament, dated 1976, consisted of three notes, of which the most famous one, meant for Hua Guofeng, said: "With you in charge, I'm at ease" (*Nǐ bàn shì, wǒ fāng xīn* 你办事我放心). This ensured that Hua eventually ended up victorious in the struggle for power with Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four. It is fair to say, though, that there has been a dispute regarding whether Mao really wrote this note or not, since Hua did not actually release it until after the arrest of the Gang of Four members. He is in fact the one who facilitated the *coup d'état* in which the members of the Gang of Four were purged.

A mixture of elements probably prompted Mao to choose Hua as his successor: his loyalty to him, his skills as administrator and organizer, his unifying figure, and also the fact that there were no other credible alternatives (Weatherley 2010, 135). On 7 October

1976, Hua became chairman of the CCP, a place that had been vacant since Mao's death on 9 September, and of the Central Military Commission. In this way, all of the party and government positions had been assigned to Hua following official procedures. Hua was effectively China's most dominant leader. The legitimacy of his post was stated at the third plenum of the Tenth CCP Congress in July of 1977. In March of 1978, the National People's Congress met for its annual session and elected Hua as premier. Experts claim that his rise from obscurity to notoriety started in 1973, the year in which he was elected to the Politburo, a post that later enabled him to play a leading role in overthrowing the Gang of Four.

At his first NPC meeting, Hua Guofeng proposed four tasks in his first famous long speech (published on 28 December 1977) at the "Second National Conference Learning from Dazhai in Agriculture" (Chi 1977, 94). This speech sparked a great deal of interest at the time, which was visible in the great popularity that its topics enjoyed among the public, who discussed the problems addressed in it on the streets or at home. The first task proposed for 1977 was to "Deeply develop the great mass movement to criticize the Gang of Four." The second was "Strengthening Party Building," which set out from the idea that to regain legitimacy, the party first had to reestablish the correct order wrecked by the Gang of Four. The third main task

was “to strive to push national economy forward,” which was the task that most satisfied the wish of the people after the disasters brought about by the Cultural Revolution and the damages of the Gang of Four. The fourth main task proposed in the speech was to study Mao’s work and Marxist-Leninist works. It seems that in trying to legitimize his position by associating himself closely to Mao, Hua made a mistake in choosing a path that was considered too radical by voicing his fervent hopes that many more Cultural Revolutions were awaiting in the future.

One of his newly coined mottos was the “two whatevers” (*liǎng ge fánshì* 两个凡是) policy, which embodied his utmost loyalty toward Mao: “Whatever policy chairman Mao decided upon, we shall resolutely defend; whatever directives Chairman Mao issued, we shall steadfastly obey (凡是毛主席作出的决策, 我们都坚决维护; 凡是毛主席的指示, 我们都始终不渝地遵循).” He also tried to establish a “Hua Guofeng’s cult” after Mao’s death through the publication, in the official party media, of numerous articles depicting his accomplishments and values. If Mao was known as the “great teacher” (*wěidà dǎoshī* 伟大导师), Hua became the “wise leader” (*yīngmíng lǐngxiù* 英明领袖). These measures were aimed at reinforcing Hua’s legitimacy to inherit Mao’s role as chairman (Ye 1998, 172–175).

Although Hua Guofeng’s rise to power was remarkable, his descent was even more so. From 1977 onward a

peculiar shift in the upper echelons of China’s politics occurred: Hua was officially in power but Deng was the real de facto head of the country. After the arrest of the Gang of Four, and Deng Xiaoping’s consequent return, Hua relinquished political control at the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1978. Officially, though, he remained in power until 1981 when he was formally removed from each of his three political posts. He remained a member of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) and the Politburo until 1982, even though his chairman period was over in 1981. The main motivations for his relinquishing power to Deng Xiaoping’s men were linked to popular protests and discontent developing in rural and urban areas regarding the economic and social conditions of the masses. The national economy was in very poor condition due to several factors, such as the production sabotage operated by the Gang of Four, the 1976 Tangshan earthquake, and above all other reasons the havoc and destruction caused by the Cultural Revolution (Chi 1977, 34). The dire situation increasingly worried the military, which realized the need for stability after the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution. This stability was more likely to be brought about by Deng, who had many supporters both among the military echelons and the Politburo, as well as among the people, who saw him closely connected to the greatly missed Zhou Enlai (Weatherley 2010, 144).

## Hua's Legacy

What comes out after a careful analysis of Hua Guofeng's life is his ability to interpret events and situations in order to use them to steer clear of troubles. According to Ding Wang, Hua was always on the radical side, but many of his radical actions occurred when he knew that his moves were certain to bring something in return. As mentioned in the section on *Hua and the Post-Leap Recovery Period*, he was initially quite critical of those officials who set "unrealistic output targets" during the Great Leap Forward's initial phase. If anything, this would prove that Hua was indeed far more radical and sincere—and for personal reasons—than it is generally believed by those scholars claiming that his loyalty to Mao was strategically motivated (Ding Wang for example).

It seems that his "staying away" from the factional fighting, which was going on in China since the beginning of the 1970s, gained him a favorable reputation as an honest and loyal man. Unlike Deng Xiaoping, who was brilliant and extremely talented but had an unrestrained character, Hua was calm and approachable, and performed well in group work. Even though he was not bestowed with a particular charisma, he nonetheless projected an image of modesty and frugality that appealed to the masses and that struck a powerful contrast with that of other party members (e.g., Wang Hongwen) accused of spending huge amounts of money for personal reasons.

His tendency to stay "behind the scenes" is possibly what convinced Mao to appoint him as his successor and unifier of the country. On the other hand, his cautious character was most probably also one of the reasons why he didn't succeed in keeping the power for very long; never fully part of either group, he had no real allies to sustain him in time of crisis. His strengths were his intimate knowledge of basic and mid-level organizational structure, his ties to the security apparatus, and his managerial abilities in water conservancy issues, among others. His weaknesses derived mainly from his scarce knowledge of the international scene and the small group of supporters among the Chinese political élite. This, coupled with the fact that he failed to distinguish himself politically, made his brief rule an exceptional parenthesis in the procession of Chinese politics.

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